International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies

ANGLO INDIANS AND THE PROBLEM OF MARGINALITY

Catherina Moss

> "Our history is important because we have been the largest, most interesting experiment in genetics between East and West…" (Sylvia Staub qtd. in Chhibber, n.pag.)

This paper deals with the causes and effects of marginality on both Anglo Indians and their foreign and Indian counterparts. The complex relation of marginality to issues of identity and diaspora are also included along with an attempt to apply Homi Bhabha's theories and Raymond Williams' structure of dominant, residual, and emergent cultures to the problem of marginality.

A brief mention of the definition and origin of the Anglo Indians is necessary before one examines the issue of marginality with regards to this complex group. The term 'Anglo Indian' was first used by Warren Hastings in the 18th century to describe both domiciled Europeans and those of mixed heritage. By the 19th century, the term was used to describe fair people of mixed heritage while the darker ones were termed "Eurasians". The present definition of the Anglo Indian, according to the article 66(2) of the Indian constitution is: "a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually residing therein and not established there for temporary purposes only" (Moore, n.pag).

The Anglo Indian community came about as a result of intermarriages between the British East India Company employees and native women which were encouraged by the British during the period 1600-1750. It was hoped that this would forge bonds of loyalty between the natives and the British as well as give rise to a race destined to be the levers of the British Empire. However, political instability after 1750 meant that the Anglo Indians were now looked upon with suspicion and some like Richard

Burton disregarded their existence completely.

Though socially marginalized by the British so that they were rarely allowed into clubs, and marriage with "half bloods" was frowned upon, the Anglo Indians still resembled the British in their adherence to Western lifestyles and values, religion and language. This according to Bhabha "unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power" and the "discrimination between…the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different – a mutation , a hybrid." This makes the "recognition of the colonial authority problematic" [1]

The British or the 'self' was wary of the "other" who looked and spoke like him but was different from him. This is illustrated by the fact that while the Anglo Indian women like the Princess de Tallyrand and the daughter of William Kirkpatrick (who was praised in Carlyle's *Sartor Restartus*) for their beauty and were seen as objects of desire by the British, someone like Anglo-Indian actress Merle Oberon, was forced to keep her identity hidden as Hollywood "codes would have barred her from starring opposite the likes of Lawrence Olivier and Paul Muni if they had known that she had been touched by the 'tarbrush'" (Haslam n.pag).

Yet the community managed to prosper by aligning itself to the dominant culture of the British. However, when the British left India after its independence in 1947,the very 'Angloness' of the Anglo Indians proved to be detrimental in the new dominant community of Indians who had envied the Anglo Indians for their reserved jobs and grants and were suspicious of their loyalties and morals. The Anglo Indian community was now both culturally and socially marginalized in their own country. Their shift from the dominant to the residual phase of culture placed them in "the unstable equilibrium between foreign and indigenous civilizations of India." (Cressey qtd.in Grimshaw 228). They now perfectly fitted the description of the marginal man characterized by Stonequist as ambivalent, anxious, and displaying self contempt, inferiority complex, divided loyalties and hypersensitivity and "poised in psychological uncertainty between two or more social worlds, reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsion and attraction of these worlds one of which is dominant over the other" (qtd. in Gist 362).

There was a marked sense of betrayal felt by the community towards the British who abandoned them as human leftovers and the Indians who refused to accept them. In an interview taken by Mea Kaemmerlen (n.pag.), Blair Williams says "we were never accepted by Indians or the British and thus have been maligned and stereotyped. In reality, the Anglo Indians had a unique, healthy culture."

In her memoir, '*The Happy Days of My Childhood*' (n.pag.), Esther Lyons recounts how she spent most of her time with her own kind as the Indian girls refused to play with her. When her friend Manju tries to get them to befriend her, Tanuja says, "Look at her, she is so thin, maybe she has some disease. My mother says that these Christian girls eat dirty beef meat and are never clean. I definitely do not want to play with her."

Another example is also illustrated by Lyons in "*He Brought Me Flowers"*, where the protagonist Karen is upset because her fiancé, Rajeev's family would not accept her even though she had visited their house for years and was always invited to birthday parties. Her aunt and uncle then try to convince her to migrate to England. Their views are depicted in the following extract:

> Aunty Mary: They would accept you any day as a friend but never to be one of them. You cannot fit into their family. They have the purity of the Indian race and heritage. They consider themselves superior to us Christians and more so the mixed race Anglo Indians.
>
> Karen: But why? In fact they all prefer to send their children to Anglo Indian schools. They think so high of us when we are teaching them.
>
> Uncle Tom: They say that the British left the country but left their leftovers for us.
>
> Karen: That is mean! How can they? We are born and brought up in this country. I don't know any other country but India as my own.
>
> Aunty Mary: My dear you may love this country but you are not accepted as one of the country because of your religious differences and also because of your being part European…that is why many Anglo Indians left India at the time of independence…there are no girls or boys for our children to marry. We feel unaccepted all the time…Don't waste your life in this country where no one recognizes you for what you are. They only think of religion, background and family rather than the individual. They get their ideas from those Hollywood movies they see about us…It makes them think that every Christian and Anglo Indian is free to make love and have a relationship with only.

> When Karen finally makes her decision to leave Rajeev, his reaction is highly ironical-
>
> "I was warned that you Christians are like that, never satisfied with one man. I did not think you were like them. I thought you were different."
>
> Karen replies,
>
> "That's not true. In the first place, Christians are not all like that. You people generalize it according to Western movies you watch. You have made your own opinion about us. There are good and bad in every community and race…I am sure that there are many bad ones in your own too! So stop generalizing. I want to leave for your happiness and your family's. I am sick and tired of listening to their remarks. They will never accept me. It is best for us to part." [2]

These passages highlight the instability felt by the community in the newly independent India where it faces a lack of acceptance and depicts a painful struggle to combat stereotypical images of Anglo Indians. Migration was often seen as a solution. Robin Roy, in his article, "Ronnie", a tribute to the legendary police officer Ronnie Moore stated that Ronnie "left for Australia the moment he felt that political interference was on the cards which would turn an honest police officer into a figure of fun." (19). Similarly, in his work 'Hot Kati Rolls', Velters Berkley states, "I left for England in 1984 and moved to the U.S in the same year. I left because I realized that times were difficult to make a good living. Yet I love my city." (25). Times were indeed tough. Many Anglo Indian men were unemployed due to cancellation of reservations for Anglo Indians in the railways, police etc.

For many Anglo Indians in India, the Partition riots served as a final sign to leave India and migrate. Their experiences provide a unique insight into the history of India. Although the marginality of the Anglo Indian community protected them in most cases from the violence of the Partition, there was always the fear that Indians would vent their resentment of the British on them. Esther Lyons' short story 'Partition' (n.pag.) illustrates this - Mr Wright's description of the violence in Punjab and Kashmir results in the protagonist's mother screaming:

> Stop it! I don't want to hear about these cynical tortures anymore. They are all sick and sadist. I want to leave India

This was the first time that her mother, who loved India, had voiced her intention to leave the country of her birth.

While those who were unable to leave experienced a feeling of being trapped, betrayal and disappointment awaited many Anglo Indians who migrated to England (which they considered as "home") where they were treated like "social outcasts in the promised land." (Chhibber, n.pag.) Rudy Otter's humourous work, 'England! Here we come' captures this sentiment when he says:

> Perhaps we expected a crowd of English people to garland and smother us with hugs and kisses …Reality was different…The English scrutinized our brown faces and tried to make sense of our language…Why don't you go back to India?...

Rejection by the British in England led to a deep sense of confusion and sadness as well as an identity crisis. (Otter,n.pag.). At the same time, the Anglo Indian diaspora in Canada and Australia found it easier to fit in due to the policy of multiculturalism. Esther Lyons' in 'Anglo Indians at the end of the twentieth century' (n.pag.) states, "Even though discrimination and prejudice is the same as in India, here is security and prosperity and a better future. The Anglo Indians are an instinctively progressive, self sufficient and adjustable community; they have been able to adapt themselves to the new situation in the new country, at the same time keep links with the country of their birth."

However, the struggle to preserve and recognize their unique identity has continued to be of concern to the community which has been marginalized for years. Ironically, the Keralite and Meghalayan Anglo Indians have been forced to accept the label "backward' in order to receive much needed aid by the Indian Government which has led to criticism by the All India Anglo Indian Association. In this case the community must accept this label in order to move forward and progress in life. (Lobo, n.pag.)

Similarly, Anglo Indians have often been required to repress or ignore some aspects of their unique identity in order to fit into the mainstream dominant culture. This is clearly illustrated in the novel "Bhowani Junction" where Victoria Jones is about to convert to Sikhism when she realizes that, "My name is Victoria Jones. I was a chee-chee engine driver's daughter." (qtd. in Cassity, 'Identity in Motion: Bhowani Junction Reconsidered.' n.pag.)

Conversely, the protagonist's father in Kathleen Cassity's "Butterfly" (n.pag.), eats hot mango pickle and looks wistfully at the globe while sipping tea as it is the only

way he can acknowledge his Indian identity in a land where he must repress it in order to fit in. Both father and daughter feel like trapped butterflies and struggle to break free.

The effects of marginalization of the community (residual) have now led to an emergent culture which is proud of its identity and wishes to make its voice heard. Such a change was anticipated in the setting up of McCluskiegunj. As a present resident explains, “Anglo Indians didn’t have a place to go to at all. They belonged nowhere...Therefore McCluskie thought they should have a native place.” (Blunt n.pag.). In 1939, the Colonization Observer wrote, “McCluskiegunj is our Mooluk. It is the one place in the whole of India where we can live like Indians and yet keep our individuality. The days of birth inequalities are past; the present is the time for establishing our undoubted and unchallengeable right to India. It is our birthright. There is no question of domiciliary rights; we belong to India and India to us.” (Blunt n.pag.). Yet even here, lack of opportunity forced many to leave.

According to Professor Dean Wright (n.pag.), there are several bumps of cultural surge at times when the group took its destiny into its own hands and demanded it become something else. As far back as 1829, John Ricketts took a petition to England and requested the government to provide better benefits and stop the repression of 1785-1857. Thus attacks from outside served to solidify the Anglo Indian community who for the first time enjoyed a collective identity. Later Frank Anthony cited the elements of language and schools as important elements of distinction for the identity of Anglo Indians.

The position of Anglo Indians, in the theoretical context, may be related to Bhabha’s conception of the “Third Space” or “inbetween space”[3] which is, according to Lewin, “the point of intersection of the self and the other.” In this space between the colonizer and the colonized, Anglo Indians comprise the “third party” and are neither the self nor the other. “They belong neither here nor there.” Therefore they must “fend for themselves and create their own identity.” It is this “theoretical space which allows for creative construction of identity of this marginal group and resists the claim of the West to brand it as the “other” as it can also identify with the self. Lewin states that in their refusal to adhere to binary oppositions, Anglo Indians reject complete identification with either the British or Indian and claim their own subjectivity. (Lewin

n.pag.).

This, according to Cassity, is aptly illustrated in the novel 'Bhowani Junction' where the protagonist Victoria (Anglo Indian) realizes her true identity, rejects both Ranjeet (Indian) and Macaulay (British) and shouts at Patrick and Rodney. By giving her a voice and opportunity to resist, the author John Masters, allows Victoria to claim her identity as an Anglo Indian and "challenges the conception of the chee-chee whore". Instead Victoria is "way ahead of her time in her desire to make her own choices." (Cassity, 'Identity in Motion: Bhowani Junction Reconsidered', n.pag.)

Similarly, while the character, Violet Stoneham has been heavily stereotyped in the film '36 Chowringhee Lane', she is nevertheless, according to Cassity, an example of Bhabha's "unhomed" colonial subject. The fact that Violet lives "somewhere in a purely physical sense", yet, figuratively, occupies a middle space or 'border zone', makes it "difficult for her to know where she belongs socially and culturally." In addition, Cassity points out that such an example of displacement in post colonial India suggests "Anglo Indian sensibilities have indeed been undervalued" and that he film is a plea for Violet's voice to be heard so that she (like the rest of her community whom she represents) can emerge from the shadows to take their rightful place in the land of their birth." (Cassity, "Emerging from the Shadows" n.pag.)

While the demand of mainstream life and the effect of marginality have given rise to deep anxieties within the community about the loss of identity through assimilation into the dominant culture and intermarriage with other communities, there has also been a great emergence of pride and effort to try and preserve their unique heritage. The publication of several books and anthologies as well as the mushrooming of several informative websites and blogs on the internet has created a new "third space" in the virtual realm which unites members of the community based in different countries like never before.

Many critics therefore feel that the community will be able to maintain its unique culture in the future. Megan Mills for instance does not "buy into the gloomy statement that Anglo Indians are a dying breed of human leftovers from the British Empire." With their similar value systems, strong family ties and propensity to be liked by others, Anglo Indians are now part of the "social wallpaper rather than the

freaks, romantic castaways or dinosaurs projected by many journalists and writers." (qtd. in Chhibber.)

The ability to become part of mainstream culture yet preserve the essence of one's identity is captured eloquently by Priscilla Clements' (Amore) poem "An Anglo who calls Australia home":

> …Australia has given us the chance to aspire
> Achieve to the hilt, whatever our desire…
> The heritage of "Bharat", is still pleasantly present
> We mix with the Aussies, with our AI accents!!!
> Prawns on the Barbie, with a touch of spice
> Served with some pickle and Basmati Rice…
> There's no keeping us down, we are a happy lot
> Accepted into Australia, as part of a melting pot!!!
> …May I say to all AI's wherever you may be
> Be euphoric of your Anglo Indian Family Tree." (145-146).[4]

WORKS CITED:

i. Berkley, Velters. "Hot Kati Rolls." *Reach out magazine*. June 2006. (Published by CAISS.) 25. .Print.

ii. Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

iii. Bhabha, Homi. 'Signs Taken for Wonders.' Pg 34. Web. 10 December 2012. postcolonial.net/@/DigitalLibrary/_entries/39/file-pdf.pdf

iv. Blunt,Alison."Memory, identity and productive nostalgia: Anglo-Indian homemaking."(2002): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/anglo-~1.html

v. Cassity, Kathleen. "Butterfly." *The Anglo Indian Wallah* ,Vol 4 ,No 1. (2005):

n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/butter.html OR www.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/butter.html

vi. Cassity, Kathleen. “Emerging from shadows: The “Unhomed” Anglo-Indian of *36* Chowringhee Lane.” *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies* , Vol 6 ,No 2. (2001): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012 http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/chowri~1.html

vii. Cassity, Kathleen. “Identity in Motion: Bhowani Junction Reconsidered.” *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies,* Vol 4, No 1. (1999): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/kat.html

viii. Chhibber, Kavita. “Beyond The Pale: Anglo Indians are perhaps the first and largest experiment in East-West genetics.” Web. n.pag. 10 December 2012. http://www.littleindia.com/arts-entertainment/1324-beyond-the-pale.html

ix. Clements, Priscilla. (Amore). “An Anglo who calls Australia home.” *Voices on the Verandah: An Anthology of Anglo-Indian Poetry and Prose.* Margaret Deefholts and Sylvia. W. Staub, eds. New Jersey (U.S.A): CTR Inc. Publishing, 2004. Print**.**

x. Cressey, Paul Frederick. “The Anglo-Indians: A Disorganized Marginal Group.” *Social Forces* 14, No. 2. (December, 1935): 263-268. JSTOR. Web. 5 March 2008. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2571259

xi. Gist, Noel P. “Cultural Versus Social Marginality: The Anglo-Indian Case.” *Phylon (1960-),* Vol 28, No. 4. (4th Qtr. 1967): 361-375. JSTOR. Web. 5 March 2008. http://www.jstor.org/stable/274288

xii. Grimshaw. Allen D. “The Anglo-Indian Community: The Integration of a Marginal Group.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 18, No. 2. (February, 1959): 227-240. JSTOR. Web. 5 March 2008. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2941684

xiii. Hall, Stuart. “New Ethnicities.” *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Bill

Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. U.K: Routledge, 2006 (second edition). Print.

xiv. Haslam, Mark. "Queenie-smudging the distinction between black and white." *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies*, Vol 4, No 1. (1999): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/queenie.html

xv. Kaemmerlen, Mea. "Getting the Scoop on Anglo-Indians." Web. n.pag. 10 December 2012. *http://www.blairrw.org/ctr/mea-kaemmerlen*

xvi. Kolenda, Pauline. "Untitled Review of *Marginality and Identity* by Noel P. Gist and Roy Dean Wright." *Contemporary Sociology* Vol 5, No. 4. (July 1976): 498-499. JSTOR. Web. 5 March 2008 http://www.jstor.org/stable/2063846

xvii. Lewin, Erica. "Anglo Indian women: Identity issues." *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies,* Vol 1 , No 2 .(1996): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012 http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/erica1.html

xviii. Lobo, Ann. "The feel good factor of the new ethnicity Anglo Indians of Kerela and Megalaya." *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies* ,Vol 2 ,No 1. (1997): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/art2.html

xix. Lyons, Esther. "Anglo-indians at the end of the twentieth century." *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies,* Vol 3,No 2.(1998): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/est0399.html

xx. Lyons, Esther. "Hope and Faith." *He brought me flowers*. Extract in *The Anglo Indian Wallah* ,Vol 1 ,No 1. (2002): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/aficti~1.html

xxi. Lyons, Esther. "Partition." *The Anglo Indian Wallah* ,Vol 3, No 2.(2003): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/part.html Or

http://members.optusnet.com.au/~lyonsfab/article_partition.htm

xxii. Lyons, Esther: "The Happy Days of my Childhood." *The Anglo Indian Wallah* ,Vol 2, No 1. (2002): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/happyd~1.html

xxiii. Moore, Gloria.J. "A brief history of Anglo Indians." *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies,* Vol 1, No 1. (1996): n.pag. Web.10 December 2012.< http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/jjean1.html

xxiv. Otter, Rudy. "England! Here we come." *The Anglo Indian Wallah,* Vol 3, No 2. (2003): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/eotter.html

xxv. Roy, Robin. "Ronnie." *Reach out magazine.* December 2006. (Published by CAISS.) 19. Print.

xxvi. Williams, Raymond. "Dominant, Residual and Emergent Cultures." *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford (U.K): Oxford University Press, 1977. Pg 121 –127. Print.

xxvii Wright, Dean. "The Anglo Indian fight for cultural identity." *The International Journal of Anglo Indian Studies* ,Vol 2, No 2.(1997): n.pag. Web. 10 December 2012. http://home.alphalink.com.au/~agilbert/wri4.html

***Catherina Moss**, based in Kolkata, completed her B.A (English Honours) from Loreto College, M.A (English) from Jadavpur University and B.Ed from St. Xavier's College. She taught English at the high school level for two and a half years and recently qualified for lectureship at the college level in India. She has participated in one international and two national seminars of which one of her papers has been included in a book entitled* Cross Currents of The Modern Short Story *published by Loreto College & OUP. In addition, she has also written four short stories for a weekly newspaper (*'The Herald'*), an article entitled Anglo Indians: The spirit within which was published by* Reach Out Magazine (CAISS)*, and a book review for Oxford Bookstore. Her interests include nature, photography, travelling and all things Anglo-Indian. She can be contacted by email on cathmosse84@gmail.com*

NOTES

[1] See Homi Bhabha: 'Signs taken for Wonders' – *The location of culture* Or Signs taken for Wonders' pg 34. postcolonial.net/@/DigitalLibrary/_entries/39/file-pdf.pdf

[2] See Esther Lyons: 'Hope and Faith' – *He brought me flowers*. Extract in *The Anglo Indian Wallah* Vol I No I 200

[3] See Homi Bhabha: 'The commitment to theory'- *The location of culture.*

[4] See Priscilla Clements (Amore): 'An Anglo who calls Australia home.'-*Voices on the Verandah: An Anthology of Anglo-Indian Poetry and Prose.*